

Application Number 09/781,372
Amendment dated December 14, 2004
Responsive to Office Action mailed September 15, 2004

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A method of inspecting a continuously moving web, comprising:

- a) imaging a sequential portion of the continuously moving web to provide a digital data stream, wherein the digital data stream corresponding to each sequential portion describes pixels in an X domain corresponding to their position across the web,
- b) binarizing said digital data stream,
- c) ~~b)~~ forming a blob list from the data stream by: and
 - c1) determining collections of pixels connected to each other in the X domain so as to define segments, and
 - c2) resolving line to line whether connections exist between segments in a Y domain corresponding to the direction of web movement; wherein the
determining step and the resolving step are accomplished in a single iteration, and
- d) ~~e)~~ analyzing blobs on the blob list to identify defects, wherein c) ~~b)~~ and d) ~~e)~~ occur in a single computer.

Claims 2-3 Canceled.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): A method according to claim 1 ~~[[3]]~~, further comprises saving in turn a list of the segments in each sequential line as a comparison list, and wherein the resolving comprises comparing the segment list for the current line with the comparison list.

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Claim 5 (Currently Amended): A method comprising:

- a) imaging a sequential portion of the continuously moving web to provide a digital data stream,
- b) forming a blob list from the data stream, and
- c) analyzing blobs on the blob list to identify defects, wherein b) and c) occur in a single computer.

~~The method according to claim 1, wherein the web is a patterned web, and further comprising binarizing the digital data stream prior to forming the blob list, the binarizing comprising:~~

- ~~identifying at least one sequential portion having substantially the entire range of optical properties characteristic of the web;~~
- ~~identifying the pixel values corresponding to local maxima and minima;~~
- ~~defining a range bounded by the lowest value among the pixel values identified as local maxima and the highest value among the pixel values identified as local minima;~~
- ~~calculating a threshold value within the range; and~~
- ~~comparing at least a portion of the digital data stream to the threshold value.~~

Claim 6 (Previously Presented): A method according to claim 1, wherein a filter is applied to the digital data stream in the single computer prior to forming the blob list.

Claim 7 (Original): A method according to claim 1, further comprising communicating between the single computer and a process control system.

Claim 8 (Original): A method according to claim 1, further comprising marking identified defects on the continuously moving web.

Claim 9 (Original): A method according to claim 8, wherein said marking occurs through ink deposition, paint deposition, laser tagging, label application, hold punching, physical deformation, magnetic pulsing or combinations thereof.

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Claim 10 (Original): A method according to claim 8, wherein said marking occurs substantially near the point of occurrence of the defect.

Claim 11 (Original): A method according to claim 1, wherein said web is selected from metals, paper, polymeric films, wovens, non-wovens, glass or combinations thereof.

Claim 12 (Original): A method according to claim 11, wherein one or more coatings or one or more patterns are applied to said web.

Claim 13 (Original): A method according to claim 12, wherein said continuously moving web is a flexible circuit web.

Claim 14 (Original): A method according to claim 1, wherein said imaging occurs through reflected light transmitted light or transreflected light.

Claim 15 (Original): A method according to claim 1, wherein multiple imaging sources are utilized.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): A method according to claim 12, wherein said binarizing includes adaptive thresholding or multiple value thresholding.

Claim 17 (Original): A method according to claim 1, wherein said data stream is at least 10 mega-pixels/second.

Claim 18 (Original): A method according to claim 1, further comprising classifying defects into specific categories.

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Claim 19 (Currently Amended): A method of inspecting continuously moving articles on a web, comprising analyzing blobs formed from a continuous digital data stream of at least 10 mega-pixels/second imaged from at least a portion of a continuously moving article to identify defects on the articles, wherein the blobs are formed and analyzed in a single computer, and further wherein the digital data stream describes pixels in an X domain corresponding to their position across the web, the method further comprising:

- a) binarizing said digital data stream; and
- b) forming the blobs from the digital data stream by determining collections of pixels connected to each other in the X domain so as to define segments, and resolving line to line whether connections exist between segments in a Y domain corresponding to the direction of web movement, wherein the determining and the resolving are accomplished in a single iteration.

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Claim 20 (Currently Amended): A method for inspecting continuously moving webs having a repeating pattern, the method comprising:

- a) imaging sequential portions of the continuously moving web to provide a digital data stream, wherein the digital data stream corresponding to each sequential portion describes pixels in an X domain corresponding to their position across the web,
- b) identifying instances of the repeating pattern,
- c) forming a blob list representative of each instance of the repeating pattern from the data stream, wherein the blob list includes information on the lengths of collections of pixels connected to each other in the X domain, and
- d) analyzing blobs on the blob list to identify defects, wherein c) and d) occur in a single computer and the analyzing step comprises:
 - calculating information on the lengths of collections of pixels connected to each other in a Y domain corresponding to the direction of web movement;
 - modifying the lengths of the collections of pixels in at least one of the X domain, the Y domain, or both domains, by a first predetermined number;
 - preparing a new blob list based on the modified lengths; and
 - comparing the number of blobs on the new blob list against a second predetermined number.

Claim 21 (Original): A method according to 20, wherein the number of blobs on the blob list for each instance of the repeating pattern is compared against a predetermined number.

Claim 22 (Previously Presented): A method according to 20, wherein positional and geometric properties of each blob are compared against a corresponding blob in a reference blob list.

Claim 23 Canceled.

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Claim 24 (Original): A method according to 20, wherein said imaging occurs through reflected light, transmitted light or transflected light.

Claim 25 (Original): A method according to claim 20, wherein the data stream is utilized to find individual patterns on said web without external synchronization.

Claim 26 (Original): A method according to claim 20, further comprising binarizing of said digital data stream prior to forming said blob list.

Claim 27 (Original): A method according to claim 26, wherein said binarizing occurs using adaptive thresholding or multiple value thresholding.

Claim 28 (Original): A method according to claim 20, wherein said continuously moving web is a flexible circuit web.

Claim 29 (Original): A method according to claim 28, wherein said defects include one or more of shorts, opens, lead reductions, space reductions, substrate defects, pattern misregistration, bent leads, covercoat defects, lamination defects, stains, or debris.

Claim 30 (Original): A method according to claim 20, further comprising marking one or more defects on said continuously moving web.

Claim 31 (Original): A method according to claim 20, wherein said marking occurs substantially near the point of occurrence of the defect.

Claim 32 (Previously Presented): A method according to claim 20, wherein said computer communicates with a process control system that controls said continuously moving web.

Claim 33 (Original): A method according to claim 20, wherein said imaging device is spatially synchronized to the continuously moving web.

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Claim 34 (Original): A method according to claim 20, wherein multiple imaging sources are utilized.

Claim 35 (Original): A method according to claim 20, further comprising classifying defects into specific categories.

Claim 36 (Currently Amended): A device for inspecting a continuously moving web, comprising

- (a) An imaging device for sequentially imaging a portion of a continuously moving web to provide a digital data stream; and
- (b) A single computer capable of forming a blob list from the data stream and analyzing the blob list in order to identify defects in at least a portion of said continuously moving web,
wherein the digital data stream corresponding to each sequential portion describes pixels in an X domain corresponding to their position across the web, and
wherein the blob list includes information on the lengths of collections of pixels connected to each other in the X domain, and further wherein the computer analyzes the blob list by:
 - calculating information on the lengths of collections of pixels connected to each other in a Y domain corresponding to the direction of web movement;
 - modifying the lengths of the collections of pixels in at least one of the X domain, the Y domain, or both domains by a first predetermined number;
 - preparing a new blob list based on the modified lengths; and
 - comparing the number of blobs on the new blob list against a second predetermined number.

Claim 37 (Original): A device according to claim 36, further comprising a process control system in communication with the single computer.

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Claim 38 (Original): A device according to claim 36, further comprising a marking system for marking identified defects on the continuously moving web.

Claim 39 (Previously Presented): A device according to claim 36, wherein said imaging device is a line scan camera.

Claim 40 (Original): A device according to claim 36, wherein said imaging device utilizes optical assemblies which utilize reflected light, transmitted light or transflected light.

Claim 41 (Original): A device according to claim 36, wherein multiple imaging devices are utilized.

Claim 42 (Currently Amended): A device for inspecting flexible circuits, comprising

- (a) An imaging device for sequentially imaging a portion of a continuously moving flexible circuit web to provide a digital data stream; and
- (b) A single computer capable of forming a blob list from the data stream and analyzing the blob list in order to identify defects in at least a portion of said continuously moving flexible circuit web,
wherein the digital data stream corresponding to each sequential portion describes pixels in an X domain corresponding to their position across the web, and
wherein the blob list includes information on the lengths of collections of pixels connected to each other in the X domain, and further wherein the computer analyzes the blob list by:
 - calculating information on the lengths of collections of pixels connected to each other in a Y domain corresponding to the direction of web movement;
 - modifying the lengths of the collections of pixels in at least one of the X domain, the Y domain, or both domains, by a first predetermined number;
 - preparing a new blob list based on the modified lengths; and
 - comparing the number of blobs on the new blob list against a second predetermined number.

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Claim 43 (Previously Presented): A device according to claim 42, further comprising a process control system in communication with the single computer.

Claim 44 (Original): A device according to claim 42, further comprising a marking system for marking identified defects on the continuously moving web.

Claim 45 (Previously Presented): A device according to claim 42, wherein said imaging device is a line scan camera.

Claim 46 (Original): A device according to claim 42, wherein said imaging device utilizes optical assemblies which utilize reflected light, transmitted light or transreflected light.

Claim 47 (Original): A device according to claim 42, wherein multiple imaging devices are utilized.

Claim 48 (Currently amended): A method of inspecting a flexible circuit web, comprising analyzing blobs formed from a continuous digital data stream of at least 10 mega-pixels/second imaged from at least a portion of a flexible circuit web to identify defects on the flexible circuit web, wherein the blobs are formed and analyzed in a single computer, and further wherein the digital data stream describes pixels in an X domain corresponding to their position across the web, the method further comprising:

- a) binarizing said digital data stream; and
- b) forming the blobs from the digital data stream by determining collections of pixels connected to each other in the X domain so as to define segments, and resolving line to line whether connections exist between segments in a Y domain corresponding to the direction of web movement, wherein the determining and the resolving are accomplished in a single iteration.

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Claim 49 (Currently Amended): A method comprising:

imaging a continuously moving web to provide a digital data stream, wherein the digital data stream describes pixels in an X domain corresponding to their position across the web;

forming a data structure from the data stream, wherein the data structure includes a set of objects, each object describing a set of pixels within the digital data stream that each have binary values that satisfy a connection threshold; and

analyzing the objects of the data structure to identify defects within the web,

wherein forming the data structure comprises:

determining sets of pixels that satisfy a pixel connection threshold in the X domain so as to define segments;

resolving line to line whether connections exist between segments in a Y domain corresponding to the direction of web movement; and

storing information within one of the objects of the data structure to describe the sets of pixels upon resolving the connections.

Claim 50 Canceled.

Claim 51 (Previously Presented): A method according to claim 49, wherein the objects store data that describe at least a start position and an end position for the corresponding set of connected pixels within the digital data stream.

Claim 52 Canceled.